

**Reaching The Zenith Of Love And Concern: An Analysis Of The Love-Hate
Relationship Of Human Versus Animal In Murakami's Novel *Kafka On The
Shore***

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ABSTRACT

Animal studies have carved a forte for itself by assimilating biological and technological facets in this contemporary world. Haruki Murakami is one such author who is obsessed with the idea of placing cats as equal beings to his characters. *Kafka on the Shore* beautifully attempts to deconstruct the idea of considering animals as senseless beings. Murakami is of the view that man should not act as a renegade to animals, rather should see them as a fellow creature. Some of the animals in his novels deliberately engage in shaping the inner mind as well as the physical landscape of the characters. The novel can be seen as a tribute to cats and the study focuses on the need of human animal amalgamation for a better and enhanced society.

Key words: Animal, human, love, hate.

“The greatest of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated”

-Mohandas K. Gandhi

Animal Studies in Literature is a budding field of studies in the contemporary society which aims at evaluating human-animal rapport and its consequences. Animal Studies as an interdisciplinary stems from the animal liberation movement and Peter Singer's work "Animal Liberation" can be cited as a founding book of Animal Studies. First it appears in the field of Science, Social Science, and Humanities and so on, but now it is in a process of spreading its wings slowly towards literature. Post human world not only exchanged human beings and placed machinery equipment in forefront but also altered animals and their duties. Night cameras can be viewed as a modern tackle that replaced the role of watch dogs and the use of animals in various fields. Writers have tried their hands in creating text that would incorporate human beings and animals in an equal wavelength. According to Alice Walker "The animals of the world exists for their own reasons. They were not made for humans any more than black people were made for white or women created for men" (n.p).

Haruki Murakami is hailed as one of the towering personalities of contemporary Japanese fiction. He is concerned with observing minute elements of human nature as well as portrayed a plethora of characters and their oscillation between dream and reality. His characters often live in an everyday environment until dream world first beckons them. Imbued with the inveterate themes of dream-reality, self quest, psychic damage and postmodern strains, his novels can be considered as a testament to the plaguing Japanese society. The present paper tries to explore the use of animal imagery in Murakami's novel *Kafka on the Shore*, thereby scrutinizing the inner psyche of his characters. Murakami in almost all his novels make use of cat as a significant animal that plays a foremost role in building up an individual. According to Jung, animal signify the "divine" side of human consciousness and are much more connected than human beings to a "secret" order in nature itself and to "absolute knowledge" to the unconscious. The unconscious of human mind can be considered as a "zoo" that conceals lot of hush-hush.

Murakami's novels are rich in animal imagery and it is an injustice in the part of the readers to reject this aspect of Murakami's writings. His fictional zoo is rich with animals of various kinds. They include the sheep, the fish, the dolphin, the whale, the frog, the bird, the unicorn, the kangaroo, the elephant, the leech, the dog and mainly the cat. Some of the animals deliberately engage in shaping the inner mind as well as the physical landscape of the characters. His description is so intellectual that his writings intentionally draw the attention of the readers and make them brood over the matter. In fact Murakami himself is fond of cats

and this is evident in his works. Murakami's picture of the feeble cat in *A Wild Sheep Chase*, can be seen as an inspiration of his own tomcat:

The cat was anything but cute. Rather, he weighed in at the opposite end of the scale, his fur was scruffy like an old, threadbare carpet, the tip of his tail was bent at a sixty degree angle, his teeth were yellowed, his right eye oozed pus from a wound three years before so that by now he could hardly see. It was doubtful that he could distinguish between a tennis shoe and a potato. The pads of his feet were shriveled-up corns, his ears were infested with ear lice, and from sheer age he farted at least twenty times a day. He'd been a fine young tom the day my wife found him under a park between bench and brought him home, but in the last few years he'd rapidly gone downhill. Like a bowling ball rolling toward the gutter. (151-152)

In most of his novels the cat becomes the part of man's identity. In 1Q84, there is a town of cats which plays quite a major role in the second and third books. *Kafka on the Shore*, a masterpiece of Murakami's creation is abundant in animal imagery. In an interview with Murakami, he says:

Kafka on the Shore contains several riddles, but there aren't any solutions provided. Instead, several of these riddles combine, and through their interaction the possibility of a solution takes shape. And the form this solution takes will be different for each reader. To put in another way, the riddles function as part of the solution. It's hard to explain, but that's the kind of novel I set out to write. (np)

The plots are intermingled and it focuses mainly on the character of a cat catcher named Nakata. The author in this novel anthropomorphizes the cats by bequeathing them with a human capability-an ability to talk. They are able to chat with Nakata an illiterate old man with mental impairment. He is described by the author as a man who is hollow in himself and is in search for his "other self". Willmott in his book describes Nakata as "a kind of animalized human" (72). Murakami portrays the cat as a child-like figure that is very much essential in the life of his characters, Nakata and Johnnie Walker. At present Nakata is in search of Mrs Koizumi's cat named Goma. His main occupation is to find the lost cats and he would get 3000 Yen as a going rate and 10,000 Yen after tracing the cat. On the way he

converse with many cats and in order to make the interaction easier, Nakata gives human names to cats. By giving names the author trusts on the importance of considering the existence of animals and their role in the human world. Nakata is of the view that the cats are equal or even superior to man and demands equality. The cats in the novel are Goma, Otsuka, Kawamura, Mimi, Okawa, and Toro. He says, “It doesn’t mean anything. Nakata gives names to each cat so it’s easy to remember. It won’t cause you any problems, I promise I promise you. I’d just like call you that, if you don’t mind” (81). Kawamura is the favourite cat of Nakata but he often could not understand Kawamura’s cyclic and outlandish words. Otsuka is an old black cat who intermingles easily with Nakata. In Japanese society the missing of cats are considered as an ill omen, it signifies a dying relationship. Murakami explains the use of cats as:

In the old days they used to make shamisens out of cat skin, but nowadays not too many people play the shamisen. And besides, I hear they mainly use plastic now. In some parts of the world people eat cats, though not in Japan, thank goodness. So, I think we can exclude both of these as motives. Which leaves, let me see...people who use cats in scientific experiments. One of my friends, in fact, was used in a psychology experiment in Tokyo University. (86)

Nakata always addresses himself as a third person and it seems as if he is always away from his own self and is in a constant search to be one with the cats. The cats have probably felt that Nakata’s life is very similar to their own. The black cat in the novel comments that Nakata’s life is “a pretty good life” (50) despite his childhood hardship and its damaging effects. The black cat is presented by Murakami as having a strong individuality and advises Nakata to regain the other half of his shadow. One day he was led by a huge black dog which belongs to Johnnie Walker. The dog can be seen as an overbearing character as well as a slave. The novel projects the dog as a slave of Johnnie Walker who has to follow the commands of his master and at the same time he poses as if he is the master of his master and there cannot be anything without him.

Johnnie Walker, whom the readers later identify as the sculptor (Kafka’s father) is a man who plays a dual role. He is a sadist and is caricatured as a collector of cat souls. The disappearance of the cat plays a major role in the novel and finally it turns out to be an action

that requires punishment. Johnnie Walker is the man who is behind the missing of cats and Willmott defines his actions as “horrific genocide enacted upon animals” (72). He says:

“I’m not just some dilettante with time on his hands. It takes a lot of time and effort to gather and kill this many cats. I’m killing them to collect their souls, which I use to create a special kind of flute. And when I blow that flute it’ll let me collect even larger souls. Then I collect larger souls and make an even bigger flute. Perhaps in the end I’ll be able to make a flute so large it’ll rival the universe. But first come the cats. Gathering their souls is the starting point of the whole project”. (151)

He kills cat in a hardhearted manner evoking pity on the viewer. Walker is a man who is demonic and sadistic who derives pleasure by doing unjustified violence. He believes in inflicting pain and considers it as a rule in his dream reality world “There has to be pain. That’s the rule (189). This mass killing of cats can be viewed as a metaphor of how humans are mutilated by states and Nakata indicate the cruelty of war and how people counter violence with violence by slaughtering Johnnie Walker. Murakami caricatured cats as a version of little children who can easily be a victim of spiteful people. Murakami himself is a cat lover and in he explains about his cat as:

This is kind of an obvious statement, but cats have lots of different personalities, and their behavioral patterns, as well as the way they think, differ from cat to cat. The Siamese I have now is that kind of unusual cat that can’t give birth unless I hold her hand. When the labor pains start up, this cat immediately jumps up from my lap onto the floor and sets herself down heavily, grunting like an old lady, onto a floor cushion. (np)

The Siamese cat Mini in the novel elucidates her own variety as, “cats are powerless, weak little creatures that injure easily” (104). These Siamese cat is gifted with a special ability that it often quotes from Puccini operas. Nakata is astounded to see cats like them who knew even the name of cars and operas. It is described as:

Mimi grilled Kawamura in a sharp tone, the younger cat replying timidly. Any hesitation got him another merciless slap to the face. This Siamese cat was clever, and educated too. Nakata had met many cats up till this point, but

never before one who listened to opera and knew models of cars. Impressed, he watched as mimi went about her business with a brisk efficiency. (84)

Murakami succeeds in creating awe in the mind of the readers in describing Walker's action as:

Still whistling his jolly tune, Johnnie Walker sawed the cat's head off. The teeth of the saw crunched through the bone and severed it. He seemed to know exactly what he was doing. The neck bone wasn't very thick, so the whole operation was quickly finished. But the sound has a strange weight to it. Johnnie Walker lovingly placed the severed head on the metal tray. As if relishing a work of art, he narrowed his eyes and gazed at it intently. (190)

This horrific slaughterer is murdered by the poor cat loving man Nakata. One being the logo of cruelty and the other being the symbol of equality and humanity the author succeeds in revealing the inner mind map of both his characters Nakata and Johnnie Walker. The older cat Mimi in the novel speaks about the pathetic condition of cats as well as their powerlessness in this world. It is described as:

Most people look at cats and think what a life – all we do is lie around in the sun, never having to lift a finger. But cats' lives aren't that idyllic. Cats are powerless, weak little creatures that injure easily. We don't have shells like turtles, nor wings like birds. We can't burrow into the ground like moles or change colour like a chameleon. The world has no idea how many cats are injured every day, how many of us meet a miserable end. (87)

Another animal imagery used by Murakami in this novel is that of fishes. Murakami blend real and supernatural elements by introducing a chapter in which there is gush of fish falling from the sky. A newspaper report in the chapter reveals that:

At around 6 p.m. on the evening of the 29th residents of the *-chrome district of Nakano Ward were startled when some 2,000 sardines and mackerel rained down from the sky. Two housewives shopping in the neighbourhood market received slight facial injuries when struck by the falling fish, but no other injuries were reported. At the time of the incident it was sunny, with no clouds

or wind. Many of the fishes were still alive and jumped about on the pavement... (215)

With the use of these imageries the novel serves as a crest of selfhood where both human and animal are in search of their complete self. His cats are captivating beings whose presence makes the story of interesting and appealing. Murakami successfully bring together a gruesome of series events to showcase the importance of human-animal dependence in a sophisticated world.

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